

HAIL

An Original Domestic Drama in Two Acts

by

GEORGE ALFRED PALMER



✓ REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

Canada

1933

W. D. Lighthall
With Compliments
Geo. A. Palmer

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IN TWO ACTS

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Cast

Kate Blake, a prairie housewife, wife of Wilbur

Hattie Quinn *her cousin*

Edmund Quinn *Hattie's husband*

Fred Woodley *Blake's hired man*

Wilbur Blake *prairie farmer*



A farmhouse on the Canadian prairies.

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ACT I

SCENE: The living room of WILBUR BLAKE'S farmhouse, typical of the farm-home of the Saskatchewan prairies, neat, clean and comfortable in a plain way. It is furnished with the usual pieces of cheap modern furniture. A door in the back wall leads on to a verandah; a second door, up left, leads into the kitchen. There is a rather high four-paned window down right, with three pots of geraniums on the window-sill. The window is draped with plain muslin curtains as is also a small window in the back wall. Grain fields can be seen through the open door at back. A table, covered with a white cloth, is set out with tea things for three. ED. QUINN and his wife HATTIE, have their outdoor clothes on as they have just dropped in on their way home from town. QUINN is standing before the window right, HATTIE is seated at the table, left, with KATE BLAKE.

HATTIE. Thank you, Kate; no more tea. A cup was sure welcome after that windy mucky drive from town. We must be getting along Ed. those kids will be home from school. Kate, you have no idea how the little wretches worry the milk cows, running them in from the pasture; unless I'm there yelling my head off, they always bring them in at the dead tear.

KATE. Children-like, Hattie.

HATTIE. You haven't any of your own yet, Kate, just wait till—

(She realises she has made an unfortunate remark, pauses awkwardly and then continues quickly in an attempt to cover up.)

Oh! Yes, my dear, of course, kids must have their fun, but what is fun to them is all het-up milk for us.

QUINN. Chris-mas! I don't like the look of those clouds one little bit.

KATE. Neither do I, Ed. I've watched them piling up from the west all afternoon.

HATTIE. Hadn't we better be going, Ed.?

QUINN. (*Still at window*) Last Friday, the hail cut a pretty mean swath south of the lake, the clouds worked up then just as they are doing now.

HATTIE. (*Rises and goes over to the window*) Sakes, Kate! Since we come in—just look at them. (*Kate goes over*) There's your Wilbur. He's stopped plowing. He's standing looking up at them too. See him Kate?

KATE. Yes, I can see him.

QUINN. You know, it's none of my business Kate, but I can't help thinking Wilbur Blake's a stubborn fool not putting hail insurance on that dandy stand of wheat.

KATE. Everyone says the same thing, but Wilbur just won't do it.

QUINN. Um! He may live to regret it. There's a thirty-five bushel crop, or I'm a Dutelman. I met him in town last Saturday. I handed it to him good and straight, but he grunted, as usual, told me go to—the same old warm place.

KATE. I'm sorry, Ed.

QUINN. O! hard words break no bones with me. I can do my share.

KATE. Wilbur flies off the handle so. People will give him advice.

QUINN. (*Turning to her*) What's wrong with him these days, Kate. He'd bite at his own shadow.

KATE. I don't know Ed.—I don't know what is the matter with him. He's as full of anger as a wasp and blows up at the least thing.

HATTIE. We've never done anything to provoke him, my dear, but just now as we passed him at the end of the summer-fallow, he wouldn't as much as turn his head when Ed. called out

the time of day. Then when we got by him a piece, he lets into the horses and takes out his paddy on the poor beasts. We're only his cousins by marriage, I know, but that's no reason why he should treat us like bum-baliffs.

KATE. Oh, Hattie!

QUINN. (*Back at window*) Father Christmas! That big bully has more than growls in his belly—there's tons of hail in him, I bet (*Turning from window*) Well, it's no business of ours, but just the same, I claim Wilbur Blake is one great big pig-headed born fool.

HATTIE. (*Nudging him*) Ed! Ed!

QUINN. All right, all right, I say he is for not putting on some hail insurance. That's my line of chatter, old lady, and I'm through with it. (*Goes over to door, C.*) We're off. Keeping in touch with your people, Kate?

KATE. Yes, yes,—off and on.

QUINN. Writing them regularly, eh? Letter writing's a great institution in the West for a scattered family, Kate. Not hard to keep up if done after washing-days, when one is glad of the chance of sitting down, but it is a mighty hard chore if you get slack in it.

KATE. Yes, Ed. I do write, but they ask so many questions, and—and—

(*She pauses. They wait expectantly for her to continue. She looks at them for a second with troubled eyes and almost blurts out.*)

Ch! they can't understand.

QUINN. Understand! What is it—what is it they can't understand?

(*HATTIE is nudging him, he turns enquiringly to her.*)

Eh, what?

KATE. They think I'm—(*She is on the verge of an outburst, but restrains herself with an effort and crosses over to the table.*)

Oh, it's all right Ed. I'm keeping you. Good-bye Hattie. Call again soon.

QUINN. (*Coming back from the door*) Um.

um,—er,—it seems to me—Are things all right, Kate? If Mr. Wilbur Blake's been making it rough for—(*HATTIE has nudged him rather forcibly.*)

HATTIE. Now, Ed. I think we'd better be going.

QUINN. Never you mind. I'm going to say this. I've no wish to tangle up between man and wife; but Holy Chris-a-mas, Quinn will never stand for any woman relation of his being mis-treated.

KATE. It is very kind of you, Ed. but—

QUINN. (*Angrily*) Blake needs to be told a few hard things and damn'd plainly too.

KATE. Please, Ed, please don't. It is far better not to say anything to him at present. Nagging him won't—

QUINN. Nagging! Um! that might be the right kind of painkiller for his mumping. Don't let anything I've said upset you, Kate. I must go crank up the old Lizzie. The old lady takes a blamed lot of humouring in her old age. (*He goes out by centre door.*)

HATTIE. (*Goes over quickly to KATE*) My dear, what is it? I mean the real trouble? I've suspected—

KATE. (*She turns impulsively to HATTIE as if to unburden her mind, but a frightened look comes over her face. She restrains herself with an evident effort and gives a slight hysterical laugh.*)

He—he—just quarrels,—quarrels with all the neighbours, with everyone—over trifles—treats them as he treated Edmund.

HATTIE. I know, I know, my dear, but why?

KATE. I—

(*Enter FRED WOODLEY, hastily, by centre door.*)

WOODLEY. Good-day, Mrs. Quinn. (*to KATE*) Misses, the wildman wants the wrench, he says he left under the stove. I'll get a proper wrench if I'm not back with it toot-sweet.

KATE. Isn't he quitting, Fred, We saw him stop the plow. Doesn't he see any danger in this awful storm coming up?

WOODLEY. Him quit? No chance, missis. He sees the storm all right. He's been calling the clouds sons of—you know the blank-blankety stuff he hands out to me sometimes when he boils over.

(He exits hurriedly by door, left.)

HATTIE. The hired man has got his label—the wildman. What you need for him now is a steel cage and a brother baboon.

KATE. Fred certainly has a hard time working for us. If it wasn't for his good temper—

(Re-enter WOODLEY with a wrench.)

WOODLEY. Ho, Ho! Your uncle Dudley has unusual luck; found it in once. It's my usual to be sent for something the wildman has forgotten where he has stowed it,—then it's fireworks for your uncle. Say, Mrs. Quinn, wasn't he hot when you passed today?

HATTIE. Not so hot; I should say. We thought he was an iceberg.

WOODLEY. Iceberg nothing. I asked him if you people were in quarantine with the measles or something he was afraid of catching. I thought he'd take a nose-dive off the plow and aviate at my dial.

KATE. Hadn't you better be hurrying back, Fred?

WOODLEY. I suppose so, Missis. We came very near it today. I promised him one of those little Woodley wallops—I haven't quite forgot how to put them home, it will be on the solar plexus too. So long, Mrs. Quinn.

(He goes out by centre door and immediately his voice is heard bandying Quinn.)

WOODLEY. *(Outside)* Hallo, Quinn! Ha, Ha! Toot! toot! What's the matter with the old rattletrap? Ha, Ha! Have you tried her with oats? Ha, Ha!

QUINN. I might try prunes and come to you for some. You're full of 'em.

WOODLEY. Toot! toot Mr. Quinn, I want some gin! Hah, ha, ha!

*(Confused sounds of the two men jolly-
ing each other.)*

HATTIE. What did he mean—solar plexus?

KATE. He means a fighter's blow on the body.

HATTIE. O!

KATE. I'm almost ashamed to tell you, Hattie, but about three weeks ago, as Fred was jolly-
ing along as he did just now, Wilbur so forgot himself as to strike him. It was in front of me, too.

HATTIE. Well, I never!

KATE. I saw the anger that flew into Fred's face, yet he held himself in. He promised to repay the blow if ever Wilbur struck him again.

HATTIE. Where did you say that fighter's blow was?

KATE. Fred has a humorous way of saying things—he said it was a blow on the breadbasket—meaning the stomach.

HATTIE. The stomach! Ha, Ha! a blow on the breadbasket! That's the place he *would* get it if I were his wife—just about meal times, if he started playing me up.

KATE. No, no, Hattie, it would only make matters worse. He—

HATTIE. Well, he what? Kate, you've been swallowing your words ever since we've been here.

KATE. *(Confused)* I must try and keep the peace. He, Fred—Fred Woodley is just a good-natured well-meaning fellow.

HATTIE. Fred Woodley, has he anything to do with Wilbur's soreness?

KATE. Nothing—nothing really. You see, ever since Fred came to work for us—*(Hattie halts her with a touch on the arm and a startled look of understanding, but before HATTIE can speak, KATE continues hurriedly)* You see, Fred's a great talker.

HATTIE. Ha! Um-m Ed. is too when he's wound up.

KATE. Yes, they're both different men from Wilbur. He never did have much to say at any time. Since we were married, when his work is done, he sits and reads the papers—to himself. He's not one to discuss his plans and his work with anyone, not even with me, and not having any children it is sometimes rather lonely for me—

HATTIE. (*Her exclamation popping out like a cork from a bottle*) O!

KATE. Fred is talkative, always full of questions and giving his opinions on all sorts of things, which annoys Wilbur. I used to enjoy listening to Fred ramble on about everything you could imagine under the sun, until I noticed —(*She lamely halts her speech, a look of distress comes into her face.*)

HATTIE. Um! So you noticed sour pickles. You needn't tell me any more. As I suspected, I'm wise! Well, well, well! doesn't that beat anything out of Moose Jaw! Because you listen to the chatter of your hired man while dear dumb Wilbur reads his papers he shows off. Kate you needn't deny it, he has said some mighty mean words to you over this?

KATE. No, no, Hattie, he hasn't really said anything.

HATTIE. Not said, no, but his paddy has worked out in other ways. Oh! I've no patience with a man of that stripe. He's sulked, looked at you in a mean way and, Oh! I know, I have his picture! Just because he is a dumb bear, does he think his hired man must be his cub?

KATE. Hattie!

HATTIE. It's perfectly ridiculous, you a western-born housewife, a Canadian girl, should be attracted to a hired man—a green Englishman at that. You're not one of those sentimental foreign-born girls who have been fed on sensational love-affairs for ages. Did you have nothing to say about this?

KATE. Yes, I spoke to him about it. I asked him why he did not send Fred off if he annoyed him. He said he didn't annoy him—he amused him and he would pay him a higher wage to stay.

HATTIE. (*Re-seats herself in a chair*) The brute! You poor dear! Here's a nice picnic mess to be cleared up.

KATE. Please, Hattie, don't breathe a word of what I've told you.

HATTIE. I guess much more than you've told me, Kate.

KATE. Perhaps,—I should not have told you, but it is hard to keep trouble within one's self all the time.

HATTIE. Do you think you should take all his dirt lying down? Women are no longer doormats to their noble lords. I've half a mind—

KATE. I beg of you, Hattie, not to say—not to do anything. Don't tell Edmund even. I've given Wilbur no just cause, I could never do that, so it must work out all right. I know it will, I feel it will.

HATTIE. And I'm thinking the solar-plexus might help.

(*QUINN appears at door; HATTIE rises and KATE moves to her in silent appeal.*)

HATTIE. (*The look she returns to KATE implies a promise*) It's all right, my dear. Coming Ed.

QUINN. For the love of Mike, it's about time. I've been bawling myself hoarse for the blam'd old horn has gone on the blink. How many more cups of tea has she taken aboard since I left?

HATTIE. Mr. Smart Man, you're a bad guesser—some none. I'll get gray one of these days waiting for you getting that old hearse of yours going.

QUINN. That storm'll catch us before we make home.

KATE. Why not stay until it's over?

QUINN. What with my old girl worrying herself pink over her kids and cows and chickens?

HATTIE. (*At the back door*) Good Lord! The west sky is one whole black smuge. Good-bye Kate. Now hustle up, Ed.

QUINN. It's hustle up yourself.

(*WILBUR BLAKE appears in the doorway. He unceremoniously pushes past them and is about to pass over to the door to left, when QUINN addresses him.*)

QUINN. Summer-fallow nearly done, Wilbur?

BLAKE. Um—nearly. (*He goes out by door, left.*)

QUINN. Short and not too sweet. Well, well, be good, Kate.

HATTIE. As good as he deserves, my dear.

KATE. (*Fearfully*) Hush!

(*KATE goes out on to the verandah and stands there waving them a goodby. The sound of their auto dies away. She returns to the table to clear away the tea-things. There are sounds from the kitchen as if BLAKE is throwing things around.*)

(*Re-enters BLAKE with a wrench.*)

BLAKE. Damn'd fool! Send him for a wrench and he brings one that won't fit a nut on the plow.

KATE. Did you tell him there were two under the stove?

BLAKE. Why should I have to tell him if he has any brains in his thick skull? (*Pauses*) Thinking up more excuses for him?

KATE. Wilbur, you've no occasion to shout at me. I'm not deaf.

BLAKE. Shouting, am I? I usn't to talk enough to please you, now I'm shouting. You're damn'd hard to please—aren't you?

KATE. I'm not hard to please, but I am not

pleased with the way you have been mis-treating me.

BLAKE. No. (*Sneering.*)

KATE. (*Turning away*) You're almost unbearable.

BLAKE. (*Coming down from door*) Is that so? My ways are my own. I don't have to borrow airs and manners from anyone. Get that?

KATE. It would do you no harm if you did borrow a few better ones.

BLAKE. (*Coming over to her and swinging her around by the arm to face him*) See here! I'm about fed up with your sneers.

KATE. I'm not sneering. I never have sneered at you.

BLAKE. (*His anger almost out of control*) Then what are you doing anyway?

KATE. I'm trying to tell you something for your good, Wilbur Blake.

BLAKE. (*Sneering*) For my good!

KATE. Yes, for your good. I'm your wife. I have a right to speak. You—you'd better change your behaviour to me before—(*She checks herself.*)

BLAKE. (*Excitedly*) Before—yes? Why don't you go on? Before you—?

KATE. (*She moves away from him*) Before people think you've gone crazy.

BLAKE. (*Disappointedly*) No, no, that's not what you stopped saying. You were going to say—before you did something.

KATE. (*In a smothered tone*) What have you come home for—to pick another quarrel with me? You'd better go back to your plowing. (*Suddenly, with a recollection of the threatening storm*) No, no, Wilbur, come in before this storm—

BLAKE. Bah!

(*He goes to the door with his face turned angrily on her, when he gets to the verandah, he looks across the fields. He*

halts and throws the wrench furiously to the ground.)

God Almighty! What's he doing now? He's unhitched! He's bringing the horses in!

KATE. *(To the door)* Can't you see what a terrible storm is coming up?

BLAKE. Storm be damn'd. He's no business to unhitch without orders. *(He disappears.)*

KATE. *(Dropping her hands and turning from the door)* Oh, what's the use?

BLAKE. *(Outside)* Hi! You there! Get back to the field with those horses.

WOODLEY. Me, guvnor?

BLAKE. Yes, you—you! What do you mean by bringing in the horses without me telling you?

WOODLEY. Now, guvnor, just you take an astronomical observation of those dirty looking water-wagons up there. That's why!

BLAKE. Get back with those horses!

WOODLEY. Now, guvnor, be sensible. Can't you see there's going to be one-hell-of-a-bust-up in a few minutes and it won't clear up again to-day. I'll put away the mokes.

BLAKE. You'll put away nothing. Take 'em back!

WOODLEY. Awful sorry, guvnor, but your uncle Dudley don't see his way to oblige you this time.

(Some uncertain sounds occur outside and KATE runs agitatedly to the door.)

WOODLEY. Now, guvnor, don't come any of that rough stuff. I'm telling you straight. You don't get the drop on me the second time.

BLAKE. *(Fiercely)* Drop those lines!

WOODLEY. I'm telling you! I don't want to be nasty, guvnor. Remember the little medicine I promised you for your temper.

BLAKE. Drop those lines!

WOODLEY. All right, all right. If you want the lines that badly, fly at 'em!

BLAKE. Damn you!

WOODLEY. Quite so,—but Uncle Dudley's team is going into the stable. See!

BLAKE. Go to hell!

WOODLEY. Right-o, guvnor! See you later then.

(There is a confused sound—rattling of harness, cursings, WOODLEY'S low laugh and a general movement outside that gradually dies away. KATE relaxes from her nervous tension and sets the table for supper, goes into the kitchen by the left door. At intervals, she takes an apprehensive glance at the sky.)

(WOODLEY appears at the centre door. He does not come in for a few moments, but stands leaning against the door frame, when he does come in, he goes over to the window, right.)

WOODLEY. Missis, the wildman is tricked out in full warpaint today all right, no mistake. Maybe, it's the storm upsetting his barometer.

KATE. His bar—

WOODLEY. I mean his liver. M-m-m-m, he figures he can buck that storm. Well, I'm no prognosticator—

KATE. *(Nervously)* Whatever in the world is that?

WOODLEY. Prognosticator, missis? Oh, he's the sort of a chap that tells the things that happen—usually after they happen.

KATE. We never hear of such words as you sometimes use, Fred.

WOODLEY. *(Coming over to the window)* Well, you see, missis, when I was a very little nipper, I must have swallowed the dictionary along with my rattle. It does strike me comical sometimes, how those long words go perambulating about in my nut, they must come from somewhere, and the way they go on is something terrifying sometimes. Hum-m-m!

KATE. Well, they'maze us, Fred.

WOODLEY. They'maze me too, missis. Well, as I was saying those dusky boys up there—

that one's just like old Heine's coal-boxes—they signify some sinister intentions on the part of old baldy. He's the weatherman, you know.

KATE. They look terrible. I've watched them coming all afternoon.

WOODLEY. The wildman is still going it. It ain't fair on the poor dumb brutes.

KATE. (*Sound of rising wind. KATE cannot resist going over to window*) The wind! How cruelly it's hitting the wheat!

WOODLEY. It sure is. Isn't the corn—Ha, Ha! I'm always making that break. Across the pond, they call that stuff corn, missis. Isn't it like big yellow waves of water—waves on the ocean?

KATE. I have never seen the sea.

WOODLEY. No! Well, the waves of the old fish pond we cross to get to Canada, is just like that. It's a gay sight. The green stems are the colour of the water and the yellow heads like the tops of the waves with the sun shining on them.

KATE. You are always seeing something in the things on the prairies that we who have lived here all our lives have never noticed. Why is it?

WOODLEY. Don't ask me missis. I've only common optics. I lived in London all my natural, except for one little tour in La Belle France, with rations found, occasionally, to meet kamerad Heine. Maybe living in London does cultivate our peepers to notice the things here we don't see there.

KATE. London! the big gloomy city, all smoke and houses, and not a speck of grass or a tree anywhere.

WOODLEY. Come, come, missis! Go on! Who fed you up with that stuffing? My! my! there's more trees in old London than you have got here on these blinking plains for a hundred miles. There are oodles of parks and commons in London.

KATE. I've always understood there were only miles and miles of streets and houses.

WOODLEY. Say, missis, just on the edge of London there is a forest, Epping Forest. I remember being taken there when I was quite a kid. It seemed so beautiful that I couldn't get the idea of the Garden of Eden out of my little napper, all that day.

KATE. (*Interested*) Did it seem so beautiful Fred?

WOODLEY. It was a Good Friday, there were little falls of light snow, white and clean-like, the sun was shining all the time and it dried up the snow as fast as it fell. At the end of one of those fairy-like glades, I saw and heard my first cuckoo. God! it does one good to have a little of that stuff they call poetry in yer inside once in a while.

KATE. Yes, Fred. But we love the prairie.

WOODLEY. Um, there's a lot of it to love. Missis, sometimes when I'm doing chores, milking in the corral, I look across the old prairie, bald and bare, no tree, nor bush in sight. What a lot you people are losing living here without any trees! Trees and men and animals get along much better together. O! you may think I'm dippy, but I can't get away from the idea that you people here, wasting so much energy in battling with raw nature, would be kinder and more reasonable to each other if you would grow trees and live among'em. They'd entice more wild birds and animals. We learn a lot from animals—companionship and contentment. Trees are good, kind of natural ornaments. I heard a chap, a college chap, lecture once, he said it was the trees taught the ancient old blokes how to build their great churches and palaces. I suppose you think I'm talking nonsense, but that's just how it hits your uncle Dudley.

KATE. I don't think it nonsense.

WOODLEY. And there again, it must be nice to be born on the prairies.

KATE. Why? What makes you say that?

WOODLEY. Ha, Ha! Now, I didn't think you'd ask me why. It must be nice, you see,

you've got so much more of the funny old world to see at some time.

KATE. Haven't you people born in London got as much of the world to see as we have?

WOODLEY. Bless your innocent heart, no! Why, missis, there's so much of the funny old world brought to London across the seventeen seas, in small samples like, from Greenland's icy mountains and India's pearly strands and the rest of the cannibal islands that the inquisitive cockney gets a close-up of the remote ends of the funny old world millions of miles from his castle fireside in that right little tight little island. You notice, missis, I said "tight little island?"

KATE. Yes, Fred, but I haven't the least idea what you mean.

WOODLEY. I'll tell you, missis, they're right when they're tight and tight when they're right. See?

KATE. No, I don't. Tight! What is tight?

WOODLEY. Good Lor! I'm a chump. I forgot you're not on to the lingo. Tight means Blotto—full up.

KATE. O!

WOODLEY. Don't get worried over my attempts at humour, missis. We do love a poke at ourselves. It's different here, you are young and touchy, thinskinne'd like, so we have to be careful in slipping you the Haw-haw! But you'll grow up and get over your starchiness in the neck and enjoy a good laugh in time—really.

KATE. I'm not agreeing with you in that, Fred.

WOODLEY. "Nobody asked you, sir, she said!" Ha. Ha! Why should you? I'd be silly to expect anyone to agree with all of Fred Woodley's crazy ideas. But, we were talking about old London. Yes, I was telling you; they can't very well remain benighted in old Smokey—what with the big exhibitions, the shows, not forgetting the Lord Mayor his own, the museums and Madam Tussaud's and the Zoo, and all the

visiting pot-ten-tates.

KATE. What are—? Well, go on Fred.

WOODLEY. Pot-ten-tates and their ret-tin-ues. Say! it's some eye-balm to see those funny old buffers, the pot-ten-tates, all colours, black, yellow or brown, slim or fat, parading about in the parks near Buckingham Palace, all dressed up, or dressed with hardly anything on at all, except their original birthday suits. They all come to pay their respects to King Georgie and his missis. And don't they get a welcome from the crowds of big wigs and little wigs, the Bank of England down to the collar stud and boot-lace peddlars. We give 'em all a noisy welcome, don't you forget it, the noisier the more welcome. In their old jungle dug-outs, they're used to the wanging-of-tom-toms-and-ping-pongs.—It must be swell for their wives to carry the thrills back home with strings of new nose-rings and bangles to put it over the wives of the other pot-ten-tates who couldn't come.

(A low growl of distant thunder.)

KATE. I've always pictured London a wonderful city.

WOODLEY. Wonderful city! Yes, sir, wonderfully wonderful! But to the poor bloke who hasn't the price—well, it's cold stones for him. *(His attention arrested outside)*. Well, well, if the wildman hasn't taken a tumble—no, no missis—not off his plow! I mean, he's unhitched—he's actually coming home.

(WOODLEY comes down from the door to window right. KATE crosses over to door, takes a glance outside and returns to table, left.)

KATE. I'm so glad he's coming in before the storm breaks.

WOODLEY. Missis, what's the matter with the guvnor lately? *(KATE shakes her head)* He acts as if the wind was under his shingles. He seems a decent chap enough, but there's some blinking kink got into his barrel organ. Was he born on the prairies like you was?

KATE. No.

WOODLEY. One of those blue-eyed blue noses, eh?

KATE. No, he's from Ontario.

WOODLEY. Oh, well, he's bluey just the same.

KATE. He came west when quite a young man.

WOODLEY. What did they feed him on down in Ontario?—Sour apples, three feeds a day?

KATE. He had a hard time as a boy and had to work long hours.

WOODLEY. Um! Affected his youthful ideas, as well as his digestion, eh?

KATE. He was made to work terribly hard.

WOODLEY: Supposing he did, what the good ~~year is the use of still brooding over it?~~ He's his own boss, with a good wife and a good hired man—myself. (*He imitates blowing on a trumpet*) Toot-toot! What's the use of making himself bluey and everyone else bluey? Besides, if he still feels sore about it, why doesn't he go back there and give the old slave-driver a kick in the gu—in the breadbasket.

KATE. It was his own father.

WOODLEY. O, Lor! his old man? Um, that's different, isn't it? We mustn't kick our fathers and mothers, we have to always honour them till death do us part. Still, it wouldn't do the old boy any harm if the riot act was read to him. It might make life easier for the younger brother—that is, if he has one.

KATE. It might be the cause. Wilbur never mixed.—

WOODLEY. Ha! that's why he don't know nothing, poor blighter!

KATE. He is—

WOODLEY. Missis, mixing is the one great tonic in the world for the blues. It was the one thing, missis, that carried us through that bally war without converting us into blithering idiots all gone euekoo. Mixing, yes, Scotties, Aussies, Canucks, South Africans, New Zealand-

ers, Gurkas and slit-eyed yellow boys, of course they didn't all smell the same. Then they send us back to our little tin-pot nationalities to again stew in our black hates and get worked up for another blo—um, another war. It's a blighting shame, missis!

KATE. It is, Fred, I can quite see what you mean. I understand a lot of things you talk about, but Wilbur—you know he can't talk as you; he feels out of things beside you. When you talk so much—

(She pauses, it becomes very obvious to WOODLEY she has said something more than she intended.)

WOODLEY. Eh? What was that, missis? Was that a slap on the wrist for your uncle Dudley?—*(Comes down to centre)*—Missis, what did you mean—? *(He does not finish; before her silent appeal, he draws a long breath and ends with a low outdrawn whistle)* So,—that's it *(Goes back to the window)* So I'm the loose nut. I never guessed it was me in the picture. Frederick Woodenhead, solid ebony! Say, missis, why didn't you tell me?

KATE. I couldn't—I mean, I'm sorry you took up my words just now—

WOODLEY. You needn't be, missis, I'm glad the old gray cat, teeth and talons, is out of the bag. *(Gives another low whistle)* Missis, you should have told me.

KATE. I couldn't Fred. Can't you forget what I said?

WOODLEY. That would be a hard thing to do, especially—*(Takes a deep breath and a slight pause)* especially when a chap's been acting the goat.

KATE. It wasn't your fault, you're not to blame.

WOODLEY. I'm not worrying about myself, missis, it's you. If I thought my fool chatter—but, say, missis, honest, he can't think I'm a chap like that—one of those damn rotters. No! Does he, missis? Be square with me, missis, tell me the truth?

KATE. It is difficult for me to say what is the matter.

WOODLEY. Try, try, missis, be fair to me.

KATE. It is not you, Fred,—it is myself. You have done no wrong. I liked to hear you talk. I got to like to listen to you; you brought a wider interest into life for me and Wilbur noticed—

WOODLEY. Good God! What are you saying, missis? What do you mean? I was never good at riddles; this is a hard one for me. What can Blake have against you on my account? *(With sudden determination)* Here, let me have it out with him when he comes in?

KATE. *(Fearfully)*—Oh, please don't. Don't do that. He'll—he won't understand you and—

WOODLEY. Won't he? Yes, he will, by the time Fred Woodley has had his say. Put your odd bob on me, missis.

KATE. You mustn't—you mustn't—you'll wreck everything.

WOODLEY. Wreck everything! Strike me pink! Listen to this platoon number A. Frederick Woodley of Camden town, one of the sides of a tragic domestic triangle! Wouldn't it beat—Good God! triangles are not for likes of me and you, they are for people that lounge about all day and have nothing to do with their lives, and don't they make an awful blo—bally mess of 'em? Hah! Here's the wildman himself. *(Goes over to door.)*

(There has been intermittent growls of thunder throughout this dialogue; WILBUR BLAKE appears on the verandah. He stands there looking across the fields and proceeds to take off his coat as he does so.)

WOODLEY. Thought better of it, eh, guv'nor?

BLAKE. *(Pushes past him and comes into house)* Go to hell!

WOODLEY. What--

(KATE lets a plate fall on the floor; it is smashed. Both men look in her direction.)

WOODLEY. (With a slight colourless laugh) Yes, H-E-double L, it's surprising how close some places get to us these warm days.

(BLAKE throws his coat and cap on to a chair and has returned to the door at a louder outburst of thunder. From this point the rolls of thunder become louder.)

WOODLEY. They look grumpy, don't they guv'nor? When--(He sweeps his arms around as if using a scythe.)

BLAKE. What's the matter with you? Scared about the few dollars I owe you if the crop goes. Don't worry.

WOODLEY. No, guv'nor, you might notice I ain't. Let your uncle Dudley reciprocate the advice. Kindly, you know, kindly--don't you worry. (Pointing out to the fields) What's going to be will be--maybe.

BLAKE. I don't have to worry anyway.

WOODLEY. No!--you don't show it either.

BLAKE. Shut up, you damn'd gas-tank. I don't want any back-talk, any cheap advice from you or your help either.

WOODLEY. Help! I'm on wages, guv'nor, hired, you know.

BLAKE. You're not hired to gas at me. Keep your trap shut and can your advice. I don't need it--none of yours, or nosey neighbors, or butting-in relations.

(KATE has cleaned up the fragments of the broken plate from the floor. She is on the point of remonstrating, but allows his remark to pass in silence.)

BLAKE. For ten years, I've pulled this farming business through, rain, frost and shine, myself, alone and made good. Let that soak into their thick skulls. I'm not squealing because of a little hail. What do I care if it comes?

WOODLEY. Sure, what do we care! We may owe something on the horses and machinery. That's nothing. But, guv'nor, they say a little protection is worth a ton of bravado.

BLAKE. Shut up! I tell you, I'm not coming on anyone to pay my debts, not even on cousins.

KATE. Hadn't you better leave cousins out of this?

BLAKE. Why should I? Did I invite them to come butting in on my affairs?

KATE. They have given you no cause to insult them. Whatever Edmund said was kindly meant and neighbourly said.

BLAKE. Damn the neighbours! Let them keep clear of my affairs.

(There is a heavy roll of thunder.)

WOODLEY. No one's bargeing in, guv'nor, still you're not so high and mighty you can't be talked to.

BLAKE. Get out! Get out, if you don't like my gait. This is my place,—my house. Um—*(With a dark defiant glance at WOODLEY and KATE and a slight pause, too significant to be misunderstood)* Um! at least, if I'm fool enough to think it is.

KATE. *(With a fear-charged energy)* Wilbur! what do you mean?

BLAKE. Mean?—whatever you think I mean.

KATE. You.—Ch, you coward! If I was certain you meant—O, you can have your house, yes, have it all to yourself.

BLAKE. Isn't it my turn to ask what you mean?

KATE. *(Facing him and blazing with passion)* You—want—me—to—tell—you, Wilbur Blake,—do you?

BLAKE. *(A little subdued by her firmness)* Now, now,—you—*(recovering his ground)*—Yes,—go on, tell me, say it if you dare.

KATE. Yes, I dare tell you. I mean, Wilbur

Blake—I—(There is a heavy roll of thunder) No—no—no (She ceases in a wailing cry.)

BLAKE. I dared you. (Furiously) Go on, say it?

KATE. (Limpily) Leave me alone (Turning from him). Don't speak to me any more.

WOODLEY. (He has his back turned to them, he is gazing uneasily out of the window, he now turns and faces BLAKE in a determined manner.)

Say, guvnor—

BLAKE. Keep out of this, do you hear. Shut your trap, you—

WOODLEY. I'm not shutting my trap, Blake. You've developed an unusual line of eloquence, but you haven't got the monopoly, just yet.

BLAKE. (Shouting) I don't have to listen to you.

WOODLEY. My hearing's all right. I'm trying not to get mad, guvnor, but a trial, you are. Still, you're going to listen to me—that's all. What you said to your wife just now was as near putting your foot through as you could go without breaking the glass. Oh, yes!

BLAKE. (Scowling, uncertain of himself, turns away from WOODLEY) Bah!

WOODLEY. That's hopeful, but Bah! don't answer it. If you have anything to say Blake, shoot it, as man to man, don't let it lie in your crop like a—

BLAKE. Like a what? Say it. (Turns savagely at Woodley as if to attack him.)

WOODLEY. Now, easy on, no more wildman's tricks. Keep your hands in your pockets, guvnor, I'm telling you.

BLAKE. Blast you! and the whole damn'd crowd that's against me.

KATE. Wilbur, have you gone quite crazy? there's no one against you.

BLAKE. Liar! You,—you, more than the rest.

KATE. You dare to speak to me—like that! Me—what,—you accuse me?

BLAKE. Yes,—you—you...

KATE. Me—of what?

BLAKE. You've thought me a fine blind fool. I've seen it for months. You two,—sitting close together—night after night—in this house,—jabbering together like a pair of monkeys—taking in his chatter—swallowing it—he—

KATE. Stop! For Heaven's sake, stop! Wilbur you've gone crazy! Don't—

BLAKE. Gone crazy!—have I?

KATE. Don't say another word. No, don't you dare utter another word.

WOODLEY. Missis, let him have his say. The dirt that's in is better out. (To BLAKE) Get on! Let's have it!

(There is a pause. The two men confront each other and glare in each other's faces. Another deep roll of thunder quite overhead.)

Well, shake it loose, spill it.

(Little light comes from the overcast sky. There is a decided uncertainty in BLAKE'S attitude. It is WOODLEY who is losing his temper.)

Good God! We've sat here night after night, yes, yes, talking, talking, her and I, without a black thought and you—you were doing—what?

BLAKE. (With re-aroused fury) What was I doing? Listening—watching—both of you.

WOODLEY. Listening, watching, good God! Listening and watching, without sign or word from that black heart of yours. Watching and listening for what? For something that never did happen—never could happen. You—you—to think that your wife—you—Bah! such swine as you deserve—to get that kind of woman.

BLAKE. But she seems for the likes of you.

WOODLEY. (Menacing him) Blake, if you say that again—

KATE. He's mad. Wilbur—what are you accusing me of?

BLAKE. Couldn't you hear me? Are you deaf? (*Points to WOODLEY*). That's what—him! Can you hear now?

(*WOODLEY makes a movement towards him, but KATE blazing with indignation, interposes herself.*)

KATE. You dare say such a thing to me, you coward—you coward—you coward. You shall be made to take every word of it back. I'll leave you—your house, Wilbur Blake—this moment. I'd rather face this storm than stay another minute under your roof.

(*There is a heavy burst of thunder as she seizes her coat and hat from a peg and goes to the door.*)

WOODLEY. Stop, Missis! don't go out there in that—in that storm. You mustn't! Blake, stop her! Do you hear?

(*BLAKE makes a meaningless movement as KATE flings open the door and runs out. The door closes again. BLAKE stands looking at the door in a dazed way. It is now almost quite dark. There is a very loud crash of thunder overhead and sounds of heavy spasmodic rain drops, the usual heralds to a down-pour of heavy hail.*)

WOODLEY. She's gone! Are you clean nutty, Blake? Go after her! Fetch her back out of this storm! You mustn't let her be out in—if you don't go, I'll get her back myself.

(*BLAKE, who has began to move towards the door, stops short. WOODLEY'S words re-arouse his anger again to white heat.*)

BLAKE. You will, will you? All right, get going—she's more to you than to me anyway.

(*The rain drops turn to a shower of small hail.*)

WOODLEY. (*Furiously*) You liar! you white livered swine! Yes, I'll go when I have wiped that off. You have asked for it. Look out!

(WOODLEY rushes at BLAKE, but BLAKE jumps at him. They close. During the ensuing struggle, WOODLEY tears himself loose with the loss of a shirt sleeve, he deals BLAKE a staggering blow that sends him reeling across the room. BLAKE falls beside a chair, this he seizes and staggers at WOODLEY with it upraised. The pitter of hail has turned into a tremendous cannonade of heavy hail. The noise on the roof is deafening. The large window, right, is shivered, the window curtains stream into the room and many objects are overthrown by the wind, including the pots of geraniums. The upraised chair falls slowly from BLAKE'S nerveless hands and he would go over to the window. WOODLEY restrains him.)

WOODLEY. Blake, your wife!

BLAKE. (Feebly endeavouring to reach the window) Hail!

WOODLEY. Blake, do you hear? Your wife's out there.

BLAKE. Hail—Hail—Hail!

—CURTAIN ON ACT I—

ACT II

SCENE: The same:

(During the period the curtain is lowered, the downpour of hail gradually diminishes until it entirely ceases as suddenly as it began. The storm passes with receding growls of thunder and a concluding pitter of small stones. These sounds are followed by a silence, a dead-calm, the hush that usually follows these fierce bursts of hail on the prairies in late summer.

After some thirty seconds interval, the curtain rises to discover BLAKE sitting in a chair, left centre, in a state of nervous collapse, the result of the recent high mental

strain and excitement. The voice of WOODLEY is heard outside, at some distance calling out the name of MRS BLAKE.

KATE appears suddenly in the doorway, BLAKE feels her presence. He springs from his chair as if she were an apparition. They stand staring at each other for the space of a few seconds, he, in a distracted manner and she, as if he were something beyond the range of her vision, when, at last, BLAKE makes a slight movement forward; it causes her to stiffen and she waves him off.)

BLAKE. (Almost in a whisper) Kate!

(KATE comes limply into the room, passes him and reels to the back of the table which she grasps for support. She is on the verge of collapse. BLAKE stands, centre, trembling, impotent, endeavouring to speak, but only her name comes in low whispers.)

KATE. I—want—my—clothes—

BLAKE. Kate!

KATE. My clothes! I'm going—away.

BLAKE. Kate!

KATE. Yes—my clothes!

BLAKE. No, no,—you mustn't go away.

KATE. Yes, yes.

BLAKE. (He musters sufficient will-power to approach her) No, No, you mustn't go. The storm—

KATE. (She repulses him with a shrinking gesture of disgust) I will—I will,—I must! Where are—my clothes? I must go away quickly.

BLAKE. No, no,—you mustn't. Where are you going to?

KATE. Where?—anywhere from here. I want my clothes!

~~BLAKE. Kate, Kate—the storm—~~

KATE. Where am I going? Where? (She shudders) What does it matter now. I'm going

away—from you—from here—far away—from everybody. Oh! (*She bursts into tears*) Yes, they will know—they will believe I am a bad woman. Oh! the shame—and I have done no wrong. No, I never thought a wrong.

BLAKE. (*Still helpless*) Kate! Kate!

KATE. (*Crying out loudly*) O, it hurts, it hurts so. You have hurt me. I could die. No, I'm no longer your wife, Wilbur Blake.

BLAKE. Kate, Kate! you mustn't say that—I didn't—

KATE. I must go away from you. I feel I can never forgive you. (*She pauses, then points outside and exclaims hysterically*) The hail! the hail! It's a judgment. (*Comes down in front of table.*)

BLAKE. (*Aroused at her words*) The hail! the hail! Yes, the hail!

(*WOODLEY appears in the doorway; BLAKE goes over to the window repeating the word "Hail". KATE continues to laugh hysterically.*)

BLAKE. Everything!

KATE. (*Ceases to laugh*). Everything!

BLAKE. Gone!

KATE. (*In a dead echo of his words*) Everything—gone!

BLAKE. (*In a sudden rush of words*) I said I didn't care—not a damn. It can all go to hell—crop—everything—everybody. I'll never lift my hand to do anything again. She is leaving me—

KATE. (*She speaks after a struggle with herself*) Yes, I'm leaving you—you have driven me away.

BLAKE. (*Limply*) I—I didn't mean—(*he pauses.*)

KATE. (*Slowly*) You did mean it. You destroyed something here (*her hands on her breast*) as surely as utterly as the hail has done the crop.

BLAKE. Kate, Kate, I was mad.

KATE. (*Slowly*) Ah, if it had only been madness it might be forgivable. It was hatred—black hatred far worse than madness, so black it made me, an innocent wife, a vile guilty thing. I never would have believed that anyone not guilty could feel like this—a soiled and trodden thing, soiled and degraded by the thoughts and suspicions of one I trusted and loved. That is why I, your wife, Wilbur Blake, must go away from you. I do not hate you—not yet, but it will come and grow and grow like those black clouds and blot out all love and sweetness from our lives. We must avoid an evil—a crime. I suppose many of those tragic hates began with such a hurt as you have given me.

BLAKE. (*Nerveless*) Kate, Kate,—do not go.

KATE. Cannot you understand it is impossible for me to stay. You have destroyed the only thing that was real, so beautiful, my trust, my love for you, this trust gave me a calm real happiness in the dull plodding life you brought me to on the farm. This thing helped me to overcome much that I disliked in you at first, encouraged me to trust my life, my future in your hands and to give you all my heart. You have destroyed that mysterious inner thing. No you do not understand. It is gone—you are no longer my husband. You must learn to realize it.

(*From the doorway, WOODLEY comes into the room.*)

WOODLEY. Missis, I know it's rough on you, but you mustn't take it like this.

KATE. You heard what I said?

WOODLEY. Yes, missis,—I don't wish to intrude, but—

KATE. You know every word I said is true—I must and will go away.

WOODLEY. I'm not contradicting you, missis, and I'm not agreeing with you. I'm just concerned about your being unfair to me.

KATE. To you?

WOODLEY. Yes, that's it.

KATE. Unfair to you—how am I?

WOODLEY. Well, you see, missis, it's like this. I'm as innocent as yourself, as innocent as a new born babby. You'll agree to that.

KATE. Of course, you are.

WOODLEY. Well, then, if you chuck him over and beat it, everybody will say—that skunk Woodley did it,—and I didn't any more than you yourself, missis.

KATE. Oh, they'd never say that of you.

WOODLEY. O! wouldn't they? You ought to know what a half dozen clacking women's tongues can do. They could get me transported on less than half the evidence you would give'em

KATE. (*Looks at Woodley for a few seconds*) Yes, you are right.—I must not go away without seeing them—my cousins, I mean, and telling them—

WOODLEY. Now, listen to me, missis. Don't you go and do anything foolish. The more you'd tell'em, the more you'd try to explain, the deeper they'd paint you and me.

KATE. No, no,—they must, they will believe me. I'll—

WOODLEY. Now, missis, I've always found you a good hearted sensible sort of a woman, I want you to be such a one just now. I'm not guilty, am I? Just shake your head! And you're not guilty, are you? Shake it again! Good! Well, your good name is worth a lot to you, isn't it? Yes, of course, it is. Perhaps you'd hardly believe it, but my poor old nome de plume is worth quite a lot to your uncle Dudley too. Really it is, missis, though it's me that's saying it.

(He pauses and stands smiling at her. She softens a little under the smile, turns down her eyes and then up to his face as if she would speak, but she glances at her husband at the window and immediately hardens; she shakes her head.)

WOODLEY. (*Refusing to take the shake as*

a negative) Ha, that's better! I said you were always a good hearted sensible woman and—

KATE. No, no, I can't do it. I won't stay. I mustn't. Don't ask me to do that. I can see where you—*(She pauses.)*

WOODLEY. Ha! now you begin to see where I come in, don't you? Yes.

KATE. No, no.

WOODLEY. Now, wait a minute, missis. There's something on my conscience. Oh, you never guessed I'd such a thing about me as a blooming conscience, did you? Really, I have, missis. It's like this—if you and Blake become separated because of my dizzy chatter, I'd feel the most miserable God-forsaken bloke on all these Canadian prairies. I'd never get over it for the rest of my natural.

KATE. It isn't your fault.

WOODLEY. No, it isn't and yet somehow—yes, it is,—and Blake has a real kick after all. You see, while we were chattering away, as he said, beating the parrots, his jealousy was getting the upper hand, so he speak, poisoning his milk of human kindness. I've heard that somewhere—and all his love for you was getting frightfully mixed up inside, all sixes and sevens like, and as he couldn't speak up for himself—couldn't cut in like me—he gets into this rotten funk-hole we see him in. That's what, missis.

(Kate looks from WOODLEY to BLAKE who is leaning against the window frame looking out through the broken panes. She shows uncertainty; she has evidently been touched by what WOODLEY has said.)

WOODLEY. *(Noting the effect his words have had on her)* Aw, missis, can't you give him a chance? If he hadn't cared for you a whole lot, would he have been that nutty? Would he raised this cain? You ask him if he really believes it of us. Put it up to him, missis; go on, missis.

(KATE'S lips are quivering in doubt. She is afraid of herself. WOODLEY goes

over to BLAKE and catches hold of his arm, twisting him around to face KATE.)

You poordumb-bell! Fine show you'd make in Old Bailey dock, you would. Haven't you a word to say in the defence of the malefactor? Can't you see your wife is waiting for it?

BLAKE. (*Weakly*) What can I say?

WOODLEY. Say! Anything. Bust out. Blow up, then what you want to say will bounce out.

BLAKE. I can't,—I—

WOODLEY. Good God, man! Don't you feel what you want to say? Don't you want to tell her what a darn fool you've been? You feel that, don't you?

BLAKE. Yes.

WOODLEY. That you know she never thought of me or any other man but you. Don't you feel that?

BLAKE. Yes, yes.

WOODLEY. That's fine. Now, you heard what I just said about your jealousy—you needn't never be ashamed of it either. Well, tell her that was what sent you clean daffy—that will help for a start.

BLAKE. (*Looking intently into WOODLEY'S face*) Yes, that was what first started it. I tried to get over it, I tried to talk—

WOODLEY. To butt in like when I was going to beat the wind, eh?

BLAKE. Yes, then. But, you made me feel such a fool that I couldn't. I just couldn't, so I held my tongue. Night after night, I saw her getting more and more interested in you, wanting you to talk to her. It hurt me; I wanted to tell her it hurt me, but I didn't know how to tell her.

WOODLEY. Um, um—

BLAKE. Day and night, at my work, at my meals, as I sat with you and her,—everywhere. I kept thinking of it. It began to get bigger and

bigger. I said to myself, I will tell her tomorrow, in some way,—then, I was afraid she would laugh at me; if she had laughed I don't know what I would have done to her. I'd—(*Involuntarily clenching his hands.*)

WOODLEY. Hah!

BLAKE. One day, I made an excuse. I left you down in the bottom field. I came to the house, to speak to her about it, but when I got to the well, my courage failed, I couldn't. I thought of her smile. I almost ran back to my work. I trembled always when I came into the house. I was afraid of myself. How I hated you! I could have killed you, but there was always something whispering in my head when we were all together—"He's innocent; she's innocent!"

WOODLEY. That's what saved you, Blake, and now—

KATE. Wilbur, why didn't you tell me?

BLAKE. I tell you, I tried so hard,—but couldn't—I just couldn't. That hard ball in my throat—I was afraid of myself,—I would have—

KATE. (*She cries out hysterically*) Wilbur, tell me—tell me now! Do you believe I—he—

BLAKE. (*With vehemence*) No, no, Kate, I tell you I was a fool—a madman to even think it.

WOODLEY. Missis? (*There is a pause*) Missis, don't you see he's gone through hell? I tell you, I feel for him. I believe him! Now you?

(*KATE is looking at them through a mist of tears. The men are standing together and WOODLEY has taken BLAKE'S hand as it hangs limply down.*)

KATE. O, I—I—(*She notices their torn clothes*) Your clothes! how—?

WOODLEY. (*Flicking the tatters of his shirt sleeve*) These? Oh, missis, you see we were both struggling through the doorway to get you back out of the storm—got in each other's way and—bingo! They make shirts of pretty rotten cotton these days—nothing like the old—now, missis, how about it? (*Goes over to her*) I said you were a good soul.

KATE. (*After a pause*) I'll try. (*Almost breathless*) I feel I ought to try—to understand. Wilbur, I believe you too.

BLAKE. (*Comes to centre*) Yes, Kate, you must believe me. You must forget.

KATE. I'll try—to forget.

WOODLEY. We forget just as soon as we forgive, missis. You'll see.

KATE. It seems women are always to be the great forgivers, but do they forget?

WOODLEY. Yes, missis; there are things that come toddling along in life—the little things more than anything else,—you know what I mean—that helps them to forget. It's your uncle Dudley that's telling you.

BLAKE. Where did you get to out of the storm, Kate?

KATE. Under the wagon. I crawled under it. O, Wilbur, you've lost everything!

WOODLEY. No, no, missis, he hasn't lost *you*.

BLAKE. That's right, Fred, I haven't lost you, Kate. (*With meaning*) it's through the hail I haven't lost you thank God for the hail.

KATE. Thank God for it? Why, Wilbur, you have lost all the crop,—hasn't he, Fred?

WOODLEY. Yes, missis, but that's not what he means.

(*BLAKE goes impetuously to KATE and clasps her; she does not resist him; she smiles at him.*)

WOODLEY. (*Goes over to window and looks out*) My word! The heavenly steam roller has passed by! Everything as flat as a grand Persian rug. And your poor little ducks and chickens, missis, poor little cusses! Lying around, all stiffs, every mother's son, like it was in (*Shudders*) Ugh! some place I've seen. Gee-Whiz! Fate has wiped her dirty old clod-hoppers over everything!

BLAKE. I'm not caring a bit now, Kate,—I'll work my hands off.

WOODLEY. (*Almost to himself as he picks up a large hailstone*) Pretty! Kind of baseball! Has a star on the hollow side. Those old Greek blokes would have said the gods were fairly riled up and picked off some of the little twinklers from the sky behind those black clouds and heaved them at us boobys. (*He throws the hailstone out of the window*) Well, it's ta-ta now to the stars. I'll say good-bye.

BLAKE. Good-bye!

KATE. Good-bye. (*WOODLEY nods.*)

BLAKE. Not good-bye, Fred.

WOODLEY. Sure it is; I'm beating it.

BLAKE. (*Leaving Kate's side and going over to WOODLEY*) Fred, you can't go like this now we understand each other. I've been rotten, to you, of course. Shake hands, won't you?

WOODLEY. Just waiting to do it, guv'nor, but couldn't offer to first. I'm such a proud chap, you know. It's all right about me going; I'm leaving toot-sweet, guv'nor.

BLAKE. What for? Don't we understand?—

WOODLEY. Sure we do, never better, guv'nor; we all understand, but don't ask me to stay. I wish you wouldn't, guv'nor, because my guiding genii is whispering—like yours did; "Hoof it, Woodenhead." So I've got to hoof. See! I'm right, missis ain't it?

(*Kate does not answer; she moves over to BLAKE and puts her arm through his.*)

Yes, sure, I'm right. I'll be packing my portmanteau—they call our bags that over there, you know. A German chap who wanted to show off in our lingo, once said to me, he should get a blooming portmanteau for his tobacco. Ha, Ha! But there,—what can you expect from a blighting Heine?

(*There is a knock on the door, which is immediately opened, and QUINN and HATTIE enter.*)

QUINN. We thought we'd come back—

HATTIE. We simply couldn't go home without telling you how sorry we are. Isn't it awful? Is there anything we can do?

KATE. (*Her arm still linked in that of BLAKE'S*) That is kind of you both.

QUINN. Not in the least. Hail is hell!

KATE. But your own erop, Ed?

HATTIE. Ch, you may bet your sweet life, it'll not miss the Quinns. It never does. We couldn't be left out of things that go the rounds, including the measles, mumps and flu.

KATE. (*Goes over to HATTIE*) You are a feeling dear! Isn't hail terrible?

HATTIE. It is, Kate, it is. Last year, I was in the post office just after the bad storm that cleaned-out-the-new-settlers-on-the-flats-along-Whiteshaw Lake,—they are Rumanians, you know,—and the women were sitting on the floor, wailing and weeping, so of course, I had to join in. It makes you forget your own troubles. Yes, hail is terrible. O, your poor jerry-ani-ums! (*She picks up the broken pots from the floor and puts them on the window sill*)—and to think you cherished the poor darlings through all that forty below weather of last winter.

KATE. Where did you go to get out of the hail?

QUINN. O, we saw the storm would beat us getting home, so we camped on the lee side of Wilbur's big haystack on the flats.

WOODLEY. Well, guvnor, I guess I'll be toddling.

QUINN. Toddling! Where to?

BLAKE. Fred's quitting.

(*A glance of understanding passes between the women.*)

QUINN. What! Quitting? No!

WOODLEY. Yes, Hail is the blotto for your uncle Dudley.

QUINN. (*Still incredulous*) Say, greenhorn, tell me that again? Leaving your boss?

WOODLEY. (*Dodging same imaginary missile coming through the roof*) Dangerous country, brother soldier.

QUINN. Get a tin hat.

WOODLEY. Wore one. A funk-hole's safer.

QUINN. Listen, you—

WOODLEY. All attention, guvnor.

QUINN. This is a man's country.

WOODLEY. Yes, guvnor, got that.

QUINN. Get this too. In the west, we don't run away from trouble.

WOODLEY. No, guvnor.

QUINN. We have a habit of meeting it fair and square.

WOODLEY. Fair and square. Got that too. Yes, guvnor.

QUINN. You're a fine sort of a man,—you are.

WOODLEY. Yes, ain't I, guvnor? Me mother always said the same thing.

QUINN. Jump your job when your boss has been hit and is down and out. Cold feet,—that's what you've got.

WOODLEY. Now how did you find that out, guvnor? You know, the circulation in my trotters have always been low—low as the circulation of your Whiteshaw Squealer. Solemn fact, guvnor.

(*BLAKE and KATE exchange troubled glances, both at a loss to stop QUINN'S raillery.*)

QUINN. Want to go home to his ma?

WOODLEY. Yes, guvnor, not half a bad place to go. The old lady always has my things nicely aired.

QUINN. Your sort makes me sick.

WOODLEY. It's Britannia makes'em sick when she gets fagged out ruling her waves straight.

QUINN. Leave a man because—Why don't

you stay and mend your shirt? Did you sleep with the rats? Yours is not much better, Wilbur.

WOODLEY. Yours would have been the same ditto if you had been with us (*Points to broken window*) trying to save the pieces. Soldier, don't scoff at our scars.

(*HATTIE has caught a meaning look and sign from KATE; she goes over to QUINN.*)

QUINN. (*Replying to her whispered remonstrance*) All right. We're only jossing.

BLAKE. Fred, your wages. I've only—

WOODLEY. Ch. Let 'em wait! Pry me loose a couple of dollars to carry me on to the next drop off. A freight de luxe will do the rest.

BLAKE. Have you any money to spare, Ed.

QUINN. Four dollars.

(*He gives money to BLAKE who adds some from his own wallet and gives it to WOODLEY.*)

BLAKE. Fred, you won't stay then?

WOODLEY. I know it's kindly meant, guv'nor, but I can smell oil. Turner Valley calls me. I'm a bit off my orbit here.

QUINN. Let him go. Oil is his fit. He'll sell half the dry holes in the Valley with his line of chatter.

WOODLEY. Good-bye, Mrs. Quinn. Good-bye, missis. Good-bye, isn't that a rotten word? Good-bye, guv'nor.

QUINN. Take another pair of socks, cold-feet.

WOODLEY. Mr. Quinn, your most obedient and—Go, chase yourself!

HATTIE. Edmund!

QUINN. Don't get excited about me. He's got to take his medicine. (*To WOODLEY*) Good-bye, softy!

WOODLEY. Ta-ta, turnip!

(*They jibe in each other's faces, but laugh after each sallop.*)

QUINN. Prune!

WOODLEY. Puff-ball!

QUINN. Rabbit!

WOODLEY. Fat-head!

HATTIE. (*Pulling QUINN away*) Ed, quit, will you, and be done.

KATE. (*Appealingly*) Ed, please.

QUINN. All right. Here, Fred: "*(He shakes WOODLEY'S hand)* and good-luck to you.

WOODLEY. Good-luck to you Quinn. (*At the door*) Gee! What a swell rainbow! What spiffin colours! Missis, they say rainbows are sent to make us forget—the storm. So long all.

(*As he goes out on the verandah—
the CURTAIN falls.*)

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